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SUBJECT: TURKEY:EUR ENGAGEMENT ON WOMEN'S ISSUES

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[1](#)B. ANKARA 1833

[1](#)1. (SBU) This is a joint Embassy Ankara, Consulate General Istanbul, and Consulate Adana cable.

Summary

[1](#)2. (SBU) The U.S. Mission in Turkey has worked tirelessly during the past year to promote awareness and empowerment on women's issues. From managing grants and programs to social events, all parts of the mission -- Embassy Ankara, Consulate General Istanbul, and Consulate Adana -- have done their part to ensure the message is received loud and clear in Turkey: women's issues are important to the United States and vital for the future of a successful Turkey. Secretary Clinton's landmark visit to Turkey in March 2009 and in particular her public outreach to women made a particularly strong statement, as did the engagement with women entrepreneurs by Ambassador at large for Women's Issues Melanne Vermeer. The following paragraphs answer ref a request.

Embassy Ankara Efforts

[1](#)3. (SBU) Embassy Ankara conducted several projects in order to promote women's social, economic, and political advancement in Turkey:

-- 12th annual "Flying Broom International Women's Film Festival" in Ankara received a grant to screen U.S. films. The film festival featured movies from the 1980s to highlight the pressures women faced in the United States during that decade and showcased 90 films by 81 female directors.

-- From the Ground Up: Building Civil Society Organizations to Succeed, an exchange program for Turkish and American grassroots leaders; those interested in or working in the areas of women's empowerment, youth empowerment, or environmental awareness and activism received a grant. The project helped build the capacity of non-governmental organizations through experiential development training in the United States and Turkey.

-- In April 2009, Catherine Jaffee, researcher and Fulbright scholar, visited American Corners in Kayseri, Erzurum and Izmir and delivered speeches at the associated universities regarding the Women's Rights Movement in the United States. She also visited the NGOs in these regions to discuss women's issues.

-- The mission also sent two women on International Visitor's Programs during the year to promote women and justice, and women and entrepreneurship.

[1](#)4. (SBU) The Embassy continues to meet, on a regular basis,

with leaders from the women's rights community in order to assess the situation of women in Turkey. During Human Rights Day events in December, the Charge hosted a group of women activists at his home, representing all sectors of society (ref b). In order to prepare for the annual Human Rights Report, Poloffs frequently meet and share information with women's groups.

Consulate General Istanbul

15. (SBU) The U.S. Consulate General Istanbul regularly hosts events and working lunches addressing and promoting women's rights, health, and economic and political participation.

-- Through a Consulate visitors' program, one entrepreneur was sent to the "Women Leaders for the World" seminar at Santa Clara University which brought together women entrepreneurs from around the world.

-- Filmmor Women's Cooperative received a grant to support the seventh International Traveling Filmmor Women's Film Festival organized by Filmmor Women Environment and Culture and Management Cooperation's showing of two American films "Shooting Women" and "Busting Out." The Consulate General brought the two American movie directors to Turkey for a multi-city program in Turkey, including: Istanbul, Manisa, Sanliurfa and Trabzon. The main goal was to enable the further incorporation of women into cinema and media, to increase the presence and visibility of women and to help establish a future where there is no gender discrimination or violence, and where equal opportunities exist for women and men. As a result of this program and associated events, one of the films was translated into Turkish, dubbed by Istanbul University, and is now used by NGOs, academics and health institutions working on women's health.

-- Consulate General Istanbul supported the International Women Entrepreneurs Conference organized by Turkish NGO KAGIDER with the attendance of Ambassador-at-Large for Women's Issues Melanne Verveer and a taped message from Secretary Clinton. During Ambassador Verveer's visit, the Consulate also organized a lunch with prominent women leaders from the media, business and politics, in addition to a roundtable with NGO activists working on women's issues in order to address the main issues regarding women in Turkey and the administration's projects/policies on promoting women's rights around the world.

Consulate Adana

16. (SBU) The Life House Solidarity Association, a grantee in Sanliurfa which is one of Turkey's most conservative provinces with a largely clan-based social structure, provided approximately 400 rural and urban women vocational training in handicrafts and instruction on basic legal rights. They also started a counseling program for victims of domestic violence, informally estimated at one in every five households. Life House leveraged its reach in the city by networking with the Sanliurfa municipality, but confronted some difficulties in getting support from the provincial authorities when they invited politically active Kurdish women to a women's seminar.

17. (SBU) KAMER (Kamer Merkezi, or "Women's Center") is the oldest and most prominent NGO working on women's issues in Turkey. Its numerous projects cover 23 centers in eastern and southeastern Turkey, including emergency support units for victims of violence, human rights awareness campaigns, education and literacy programs, and support for women entrepreneurship. KAMER is particularly active in southeast Turkey with programs to eliminate violence against women and girls, including "honor" killings and suicides, and shelters for battered women. U.S. Consulate Adana chose KAMER's Diyarbakir chapter program focused on capacity building to help KAMER establish standardized, professional methodologies for helping female victims of crime and eventually to produce

more effective programs. The training also focused on how to establish and manage an Emergency Support Center, gather data and analyze it in a way that can shape national policy and cultural norms, render support services to a victim, respond to "honor" crimes, and how best to cooperate with local entities such as bar associations, press, human rights organizations and business circles. Post also gave a small grant to KAMER in Bingol, one of Turkey's least populated and poorest provinces with a literacy rate estimated at around 60 percent, to partner with local government institutions and hold town hall meetings to discuss women's rights, "honor" killings and suicides, discrimination, and gender roles. KAMER Bingol continues seeking ways to knit a tighter support network for women and girls in an exceptionally underdeveloped and underfunded area.

18. (SBU) Post's grant program with Adiyaman province's Anatolian Women's Association was very successful. We selected the organization based on its track record of sponsoring extensive training courses in reading and writing, human rights awareness, and principles of entrepreneurship (including vocational classes). Over six months, the AAWA provided literacy training for 70 women and sent an additional 70 through a vocational and business basics training course where they learned to make and sell traditional dolls and lace embroidery. Sixty unemployed women were trained in basic computer skills to boost their chances of finding secretarial work. The AAWA organized one of the city's most significant reproductive health awareness campaigns in partnership with the Ministry of Health, which they report has contributed to a recent decline in the city's birthrate. The AAWA president is a dynamic, energetic woman who does not hesitate to leverage political and academic ties in Istanbul and Ankara to help her cause. She also understands the value of networking on a local and provincial level as a force multiplier for programs. Post has maintained close ties with these organizations long after the grants have concluded. The Pol-Econ officer is exploring coordination with Life House to establish a rural Women's Library for recent literacy training graduates and other villagers. Post remains close with AAWA President Hayriye Ersoy, whose tireless activism for underrepresented women has won the association new European Union-funded programs. Post is looking at ways to support KAMER Bingol's former president, who has resigned to start a new foundation to support female entrepreneurship and economic justice programs.

19. (SBU) U.S. Consulate Adana continues to work actively to promote women's rights in the 22-province consular district. To mark Human Rights Day and the 16 Days of Activism to Eliminate Gender-Based Violence, the Pol-Econ officer organized a DVC with Ms. Rene Renick, director of programs and operations at the National Network to End Domestic Violence. Ms. Renick shared ideas and expertise with ten women representing Adana's local government, legal, civil society, academic and health sectors. Participants discussed advances made in combating domestic violence in the United States, the political and legal framework of the struggle, and the importance of developing "best practices" policies and tools adapted to the Turkish context - from awareness campaigns and shelters to punishment and rehabilitation of perpetrators. For our audience, the most important take-away lesson from the program was that building a broad, coordinated community response to gender-based violence is essential. Our participants left energized and inspired, with ideas on how to continue ensuring a supportive community infrastructure.

Challenges for the Future

10. (SBU) Post enjoyed immense success as a result of our small grants programs for empowering women and girls. Unfortunately, with no additional funding, we were not able to capitalize on the momentum. Given the paucity of program and representational funds, it has been difficult to continue face-to-face outreach to these groups across the country,

especially in the critical and remote areas of southeast Turkey. There is no end to the need for human-rights awareness campaigns, literacy training, vocational training, instruction on entrepreneurship, access to basic education, educating boys and men in elimination of domestic violence campaigns, and much more.

¶11. (SBU) Some other endemic problems for women's rights groups are:

-- Often there is no linkage and/or networking between civil society, charitable organizations, EU grants, and GOT programs. Each activist seems to be working independently without sharing information, funding, or knowledge. Further compounding this, NGOs that do establish links are not partnering together well.

-- Access to an education is still a serious problem for girls, especially in the Southeast.

-- NGOs and activists are not sufficiently trained. Most NGOs simply react to problems rather than taking a proactive approach to advocate on important issues. NGO exchange and training programs between the United States and Turkey could help them to develop new techniques and skills to gain attention and advocate for vital rights.

¶12. (SBU) Mission Turkey will continue to carry out innovative speaker programs and other outreach appropriate to the local context, like Consulate Adana's plan for a breast-cancer awareness campaign partnering with a local hospital and Adana's university. Mission Turkey will continue to leverage partnerships and sponsors to provide force multipliers for existing speaker and exchange programs.

The United States should play a unifying role in bringing various parties to the table to unite efforts of the local and central government, NGOs, the healthcare sector and academia, who often do not know or understand what their counterparts are doing on women's issues. Furthermore, training and education on issues of advocacy and organizing will help bring civil society in Turkey to a place where real dialogue -- and real change -- can continue.

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